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ABSTRACT

In 1980 the first women graduated from the military and college training program at West Point. To investigate the progress of both male and female graduates as they assume leadership roles in the regular Army, 35 women and 113 men responded to a survey assessing career involvement and planning, commitment and adjustment, and satisfaction. Analysis of results showed that, in the area of career planning, all officers relied on self-initiated planning rather than help from a superior officer, with women reporting less help than men. Forty percent of the women and 19% of the men planned to leave the Army upon completing their obligation. There were no gender differences in graduates' adjustment to the role of Army officer; however, women were less satisfied than men with their adjustment. Most women (72%) and most men (80%) felt their spouses supported their career, and most women (64%) and most men (56%) in dual career partnership reported that their careers were compatible. Finally, women felt less satisfied than men with their overall job. The findings suggest that gender differences arise when the role demands of the officer conflict with other roles, such as mothers and women. These findings are consistent with other research on the role conflicts and stresses involved in breaking into nontraditional occupations. (BL)

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A Report on Women West Point Graduates
Assuming Nontraditional Roles

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A Report on Women West Point Graduates

Assuming Nontraditional Roles

In 1976, 119 women matriculated in the United States Military Academy at West Point. The adaptation and integration of these women into the Academy is described elsewhere (see for example, Adams, 1979; Yoder, Adams, & Prince, 1983). Sixty-two of these pioneer women became the first women graduates after four years of both military and college training, and they assumed their role as officers in the regular Army. After completing two years of their five-year obligation, all women and a sample of 186 men, stratified by work specialty and geographic location, were contacted to complete surveys and participate in interviews. Of these, 35 women and 113 men responded to the survey (for an overall response rate of 60%). The purpose of the present paper is to report the preliminary survey data on the progress of these women and men as they assume leadership roles in the regular Army.

Method

The survey focused on nine areas of officers' lives, three of which will be discussed here: (a) career involvement and planning, (b) commitment and adjustment, and (c) satisfaction (for a more complete look at this ongoing work, see Yoder & Adams, 1984).

Strategies for career planning were assessed through eight items, half of which dealt with self-initiated plans; the other half involved advisement from superior officers. Respondents were asked to rate on four-point scales ("none" to "a great deal") how much: they assess their own strengths, weaknesses, and interests, get information about career opportunities, set career goals, and plan strategies for achieving these goals. Officers also rated their overall career involvement by indicating

whether or not they agreed with six statements describing identification with career, sense of well-being, pride in their career, and overall importance of their career (three items). Finally, new officers were asked to indicate their career intentions from definitely leaving the Army to staying until retirement in 20 years.

Analyses of the measures of career planning showed that they can be divided along two lines: self-made plans (coefficient alpha (Cronbach & Azuma, 1962) = .69) and advisement (alpha = .85). The four items within these broad areas can be summed to provide overall composites of both types of strategies. The six measures of career involvement (alpha = .87) can be summed to give an overall measure of this factor.

Adjustment to the role of Army officer and to the life-style of the Army were assessed on five-point Likert scales (with five being "very satisfactory"). The commitment of married and engaged officers (25 women and 63 men) was measured by three five-point items involving the commitment they feel their spouse or finance exhibits (a) toward Army life and (b) toward the respondent's career; and (c) the degree to which the careers of these partners are compatible.

The survey included indices of both job and social satisfaction. The 18-item scale of job satisfaction developed by Brayfield and Rothe (1951) was factor analyzed and found to be best represented by a single overall composite (alpha = .95). The 25-item scale of personal and social satisfaction also can be presented by a unit-weighted composite of all items (alpha = .88).

Results

Career Plans

Overall, all officers relied on self-initiated planning ($\bar{X} = 3.34$) to a greater degree than on advice and help from superior officers ($\bar{X} = 2.54$,

$t(145) = 15.42, p < .001$). Almost all officers (97%) try to assess their own strengths, weaknesses, and interests; most gather information about career opportunities (86%), set personal goals (91%), and plan strategies for achieving them (80%). In sharp contrast, many graduates report that they get very little help from superior officers concerning these four career planning strategies: assessment (32%), information gathering (43%), goal setting (54%) and planning strategies (52%; see Fig. 1).

This contrast is more striking for female officers. In fact, women ($\bar{X} = 2.28$) report getting even less help from superior officers than do men ($\bar{X} = 2.63, t(145) = 2.48, p < .05$). In particular, women feel that they get less help with self-assessment ($\bar{X} = 2.49$) and information gathering ($\bar{X} = 2.26$) than do men ($\bar{X} = 2.90, t(146) = 2.68, p < .01; \bar{X} = 2.61, t(145) = 1.91, p = .06$, respectively). The descriptive statistics for these two items are even more telling. Fifty-two per cent of the women report getting little or no help assessing their own strengths, weaknesses, and interests compared with only 26% of the men. A parallel pattern is found for information gathering as 60% of the women and 38% of the men report little to no advisement from superior officers.

Career planning generally is self-initiated by new officers. This is especially true for the female graduates. There is no direct evidence to determine whether this reliance on self-help and lack of advisement from superiors is due to a failure of new officers to solicit help and/or a failure of superior officers to offer it.

Using the composite of career involvement, overall involvement is moderately high ($\bar{X} = 3.6$ on a five-point scale), and there are no significant differences between women ($\bar{X} = 3.5$) and men ($\bar{X} = 3.7$). Most officers agree strongly with each item, ranging from 55% who would begin a self-description by stating their career to 83% who have a sense of pride

in their career (see Fig. 2). Although there are no significant differences in the inferential statistics comparing women and men, the descriptive statistics show a full 40% of the women and 25% of the men would not state their career as the first entry in a self-description. Also, 32% of the women and 20% of the men would not rank their career at or near the top of what they do. Career involvement seems to be important to these officers, however, within the context of broader self-identity and life-style, career is only one of many significant factors.

Most men (53%) intend to remain in the Army beyond their five-year obligation, while only 29% of the women report these intentions (see Fig. 3). Within these, 15% of the men and 6% of the women plan to stay 20 years until retirement. Forty per cent of the women probably or definitely will leave the Army upon completing their obligation, while only 19% of the men feel this way. Directly comparing the two sexes, women ($\bar{X} = 2.74$) intend to stay in the Army significantly less than men ($\bar{X} = 3.48$, $t(145) = 3.63$, $p < .01$).

Commitment and Adjustment

Graduates' adjustment to the role of an Army officer ($\bar{X} = 4.43$) and to the Army's life-style ($\bar{X} = 4.1$) are both high (five-point scales). There are no gender differences on the latter. However, women ($\bar{X} = 4.17$) are less satisfied with their adjustment to the role of an Army officer than are men ($\bar{X} = 4.52$, $t(145) = 2.81$, $p < .01$).

The 63 men (56%) and 25 women (71%) who are married or engaged rated: the commitment they feel their partner exhibits (a) toward Army life and (b) toward the respondent's career; and (c) the degree to which the careers of dual-career couples are compatible. Husbands ($\bar{X} = 4.0$) are perceived as showing more commitment to Army life than are wives ($\bar{X} = 3.37$, $t(90) = 2.30$, $p < .05$). Most women officers (80%) feel that their

husbands are committed to the Army's life-style while 63% of the men feel this way about their wife's commitment (see Fig. 4). However, this may be confounded by the possibility that the husbands of female officers tend to be military personnel themselves, unlike the wives of most male officers. Hence, the former would be more committed to Army life than the latter by virtue of their own career commitments, not just those of their spouse.

This possible bias of spouses' career commitment is lacking in the other two items concerning spouses--support for the graduate's career and dual-career compatibility. It is interesting to note that there are no gender differences for either support (men: $\bar{X} = 4.03$; women: $\bar{X} = 3.64$) or compatibility (men: $\bar{X} = 3.42$; women: $\bar{X} = 3.84$). Most women (72%) and men (80%) feel that their spouse supports their career; most women (64%) and men (56%) in dual-career partnerships find that their careers are compatible. (It is interesting to note that 57 men (90%) and all 25 women who are married or engaged are involved in dual-career relationships.)

The final item in this section deals with the plans of married and engaged officers to combine or separate career and family plans (see Table 1). The pattern of responses of women and men differed for this item (Chi Square(4) = 10.95, $p=.05$). The most popular of the six single choices for both men (56%) and women (46%) is to combine a military career with having children. However, fully one-half of the women (compared with 36%) of the men) plan to have children after leaving the military (half of these women plan to combine families with a civilian career). Given the finding that women plan to leave the military at a greater rate than men, it would be informative to discover if these intentions simply make it more realistic for women to plan families in a civilian setting or if plans to have children compel women to leave the military. The latter possibility implies that women regard childbearing as less compatible with a military

career than do men. This is particularly interesting given that the overwhelming majority of both women (96%) and men (92%) plan to start families at some time during their lives.

Satisfaction

Women ($\bar{X} = 3.78$ on a five-point scale) and men ($\bar{X} = 3.71$) report the same levels of moderate satisfaction with their social and personal lives. There is a tendency for women ($\bar{X} = 3.28$) to feel less satisfied with their overall job than do men ($\bar{X} = 3.54$, $t(146) = 1.76$, $p = .08$). The latter measure seems consistent with the reported intention of more women than men to leave the Army when their obligation is fulfilled.

Discussion

These women officers still are ground-breaking as they are the first to assume the nontraditional roles of West Point cadet and officer. Gender differences arise in our data when role demands of the officer conflict with other roles, such as mother and woman (also found by Epstein, 1970; Terborg, 1977). Specifically, problems for women officers arise in adjusting to the role of Army officer (see for example, Chassie & Bhagat, 1980), career planning with her superior (see Holahan, 1979), job satisfaction, and intent to remain in the nontraditional role of an Army officer.

Kanter (1977) describes a similar pattern of work relationships when underrepresented, token women enter the male-dominated corporate world. Managers who are accustomed to working solely with male peers are uncertain about how to interact with members of the token group. One way to reduce these uncertainties is to role encapsulate the token women into stereotypic positions. Token women then are expected to act like women in general by adhering to feminine sex-role expectations and by avoiding masculine ones. Conflicts for both the token and the members of the

dominant group arise whenever these sex-role expectations conflict with role demands. This conflict then is exaggerated whenever the work role is defined in terms that are appropriate only to the masculine sex-role (O'Leary, 1974). In the case of women officers, these conflicts occur most frequently in the male-appropriate roles of officer, leader, careerist, colleague, and subordinate, that is, throughout much of the job (see Yoder & Adams (1984) for further support for this interpretation).

In contrast, when role conflicts and stereotypic expectations (Adams, Lawrence, & Cook, 1979) are not salient, women show high involvement, commitment, and overall social and personal satisfaction. Combined with the work of others (see for example, O'Farrell & Harlan, 1982; Yockey, 1978), an initial sketch is drawn which illustrates some of the role conflicts and stresses involved in breaking into nontraditional roles.

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TABLE 1

**PERCENTAGE OF MARRIED AND ENGAGED
OFFICERS COMBINING CAREER AND FAMILY**

CAREER/FAMILY PLANS	MEN	WOMEN
MILITARY CAREER/NO CHILDREN	2	0
MILITARY CAREER/CHILDREN	56	46
CIVILIAN CAREER/NO CHILDREN	2	4
CIVILIAN CAREER/CHILDREN	32	25
CHILDREN AFTER ARMY	3	25
NO FAMILY OR CAREER PLANS	5	0
TOTAL MILITARY CAREER	58	46
TOTAL CIVILIAN LIFE	37	54

STRATEGIES FOR CAREER PLANNING

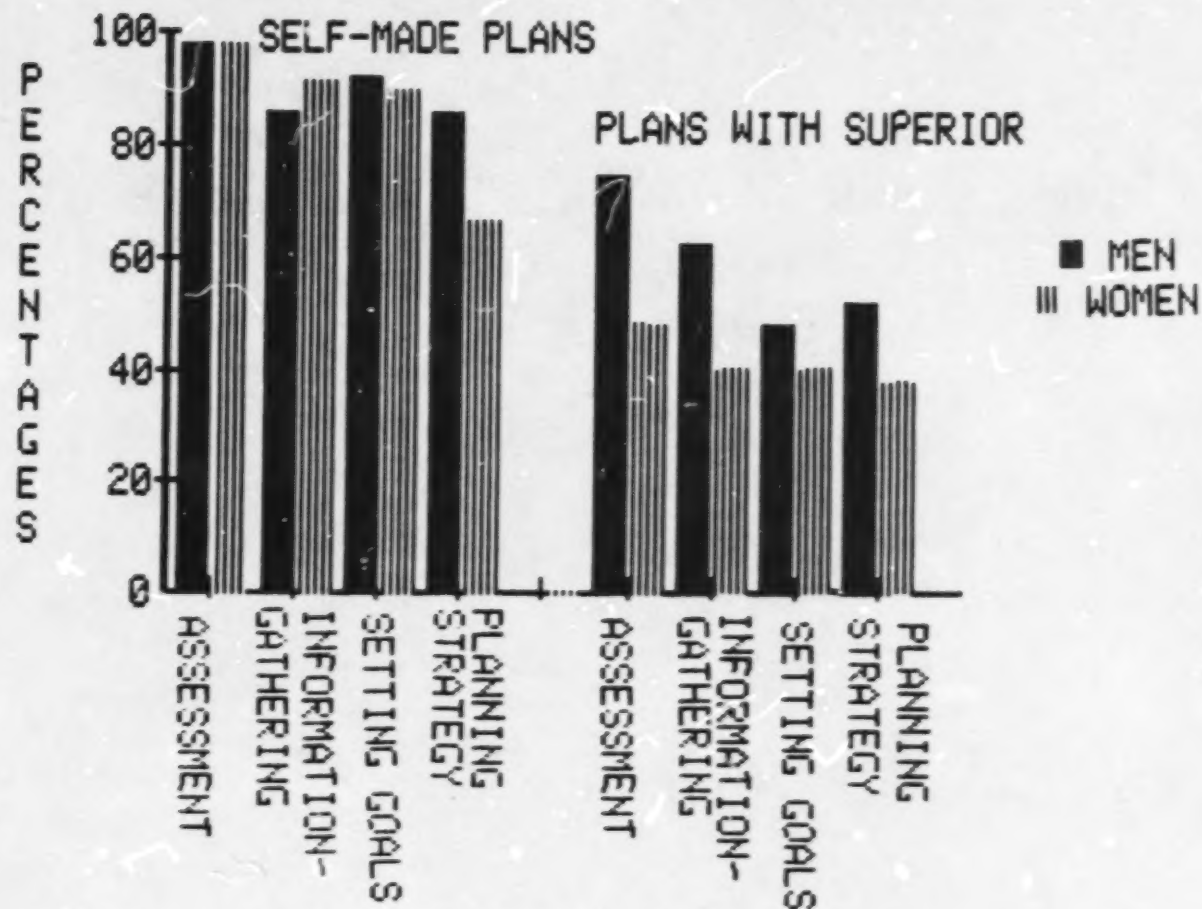


FIG. 1. THE PERCENTAGE OF MEN AND WOMEN USING EACH STRATEGY OF CAREER PLANNING.

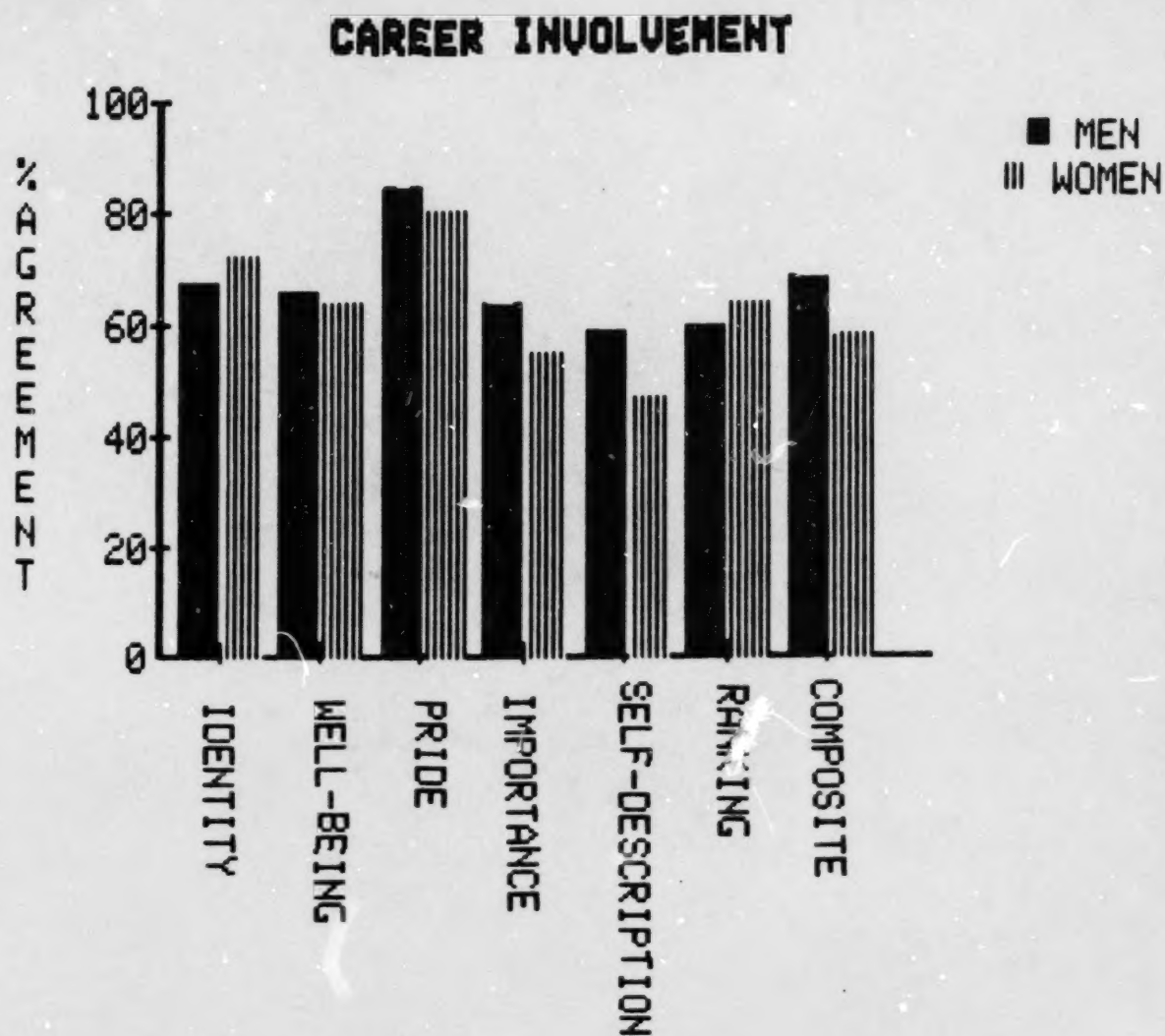


FIG. 2. THE PERCENTAGE OF MEN AND WOMEN AGREEING WITH EACH STATEMENT OF CAREER INVOLVEMENT.

MEN'S AND WOMEN'S CAREER INTENTIONS

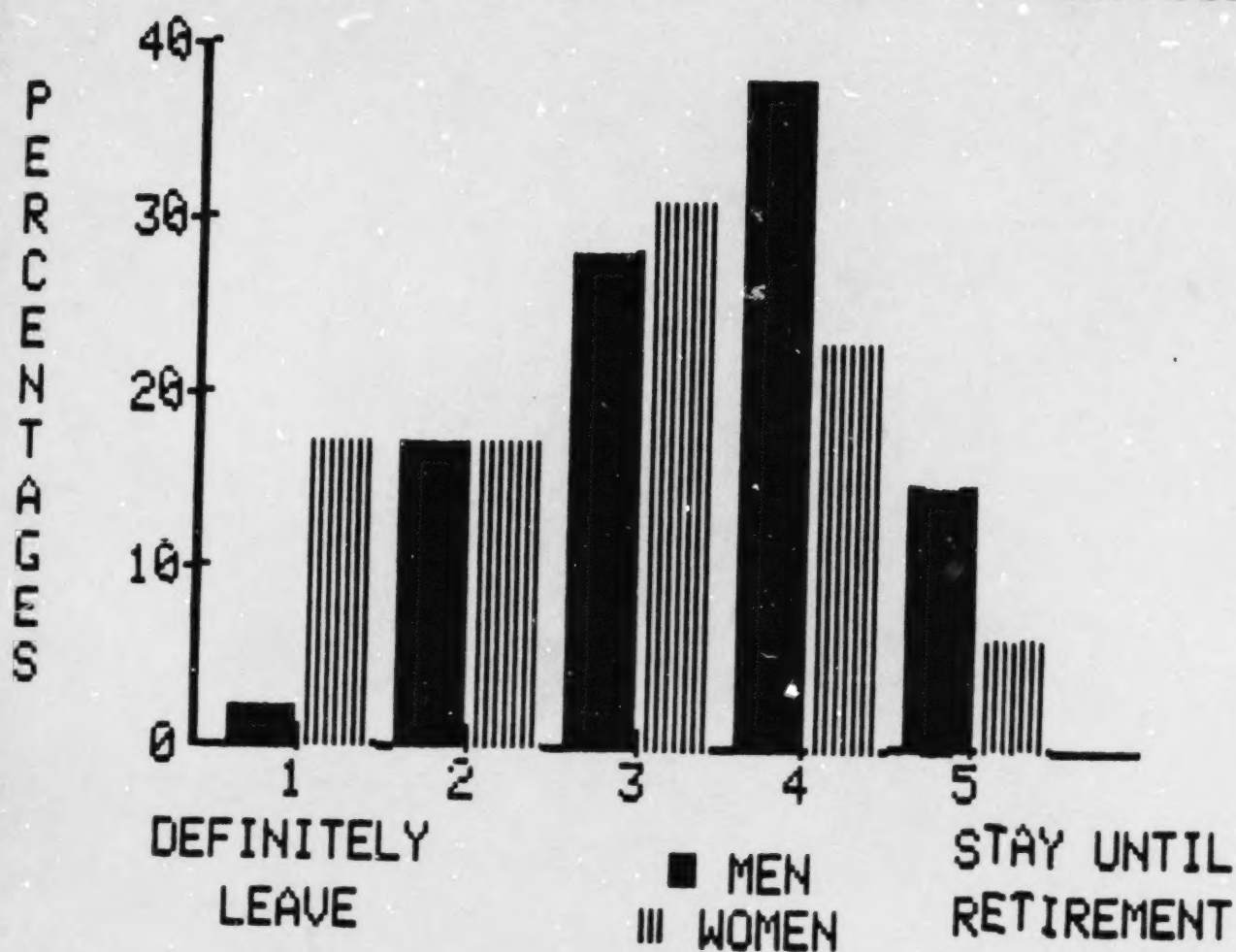


FIG. 3. THE PERCENTAGE OF MEN AND WOMEN REPORTING EACH CAREER INTENTION.

SPOUSES' COMMITMENT AND COMPATIBILITY

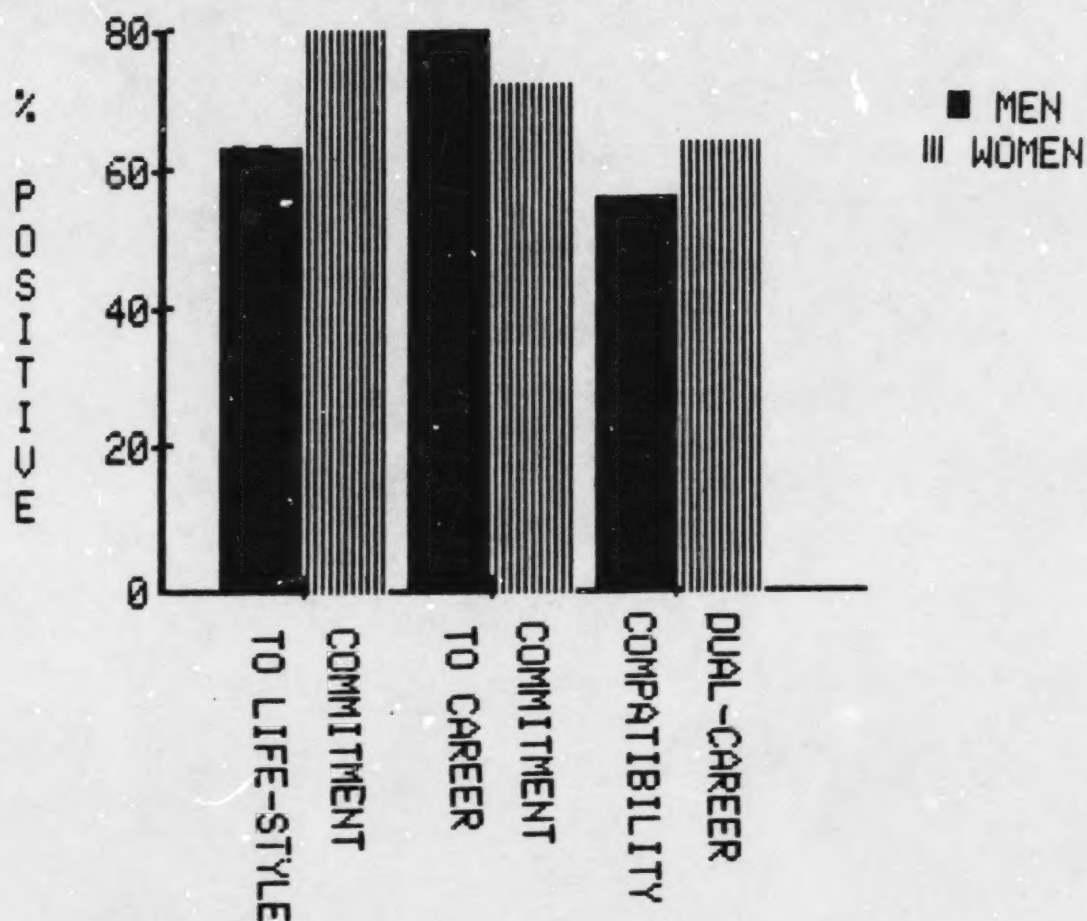


FIG. 4. THE PERCENTAGE OF MEN AND WOMEN REPORTING POSITIVE COMMITMENT AND CAREER COMPATIBILITY OF SPOUSES.